



Directorate of  
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**Near East and  
South Asia Review**

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**Supplement  
14 March 1986**

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Article

The Afghan Military: Weak but Surviving [redacted]

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The Afghan Government has been doing more to expand and improve the capability of its Armed Forces over the last six months, probably largely as a result of Soviet pressure to assume a larger role in the war, but low morale, defections and desertions, inadequate conscription, and significant casualties continue to plague the military. [redacted]

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*Some articles are preliminary views of a subject or speculative, but the contents normally will be coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Occasionally an article will represent the views of a single analyst; these items will be designated as noncoordinated views.* [redacted]

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Article

The Afghan Military:  
Weak but Surviving

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The Afghan Government has been doing more to expand and improve the capability of its Armed Forces over the last six months, probably largely as a result of Soviet pressure to assume a larger role in the war. During this period, the Afghan army has evidenced marginal improvements—there have been fewer cases of disintegration under fire than in the past—but its ability to fight the insurgents has not grown substantially. Low morale, defections and desertions, inadequate conscription, and significant casualties continue to plague the army. In our view, it will remain seriously under strength, and the regime’s recent emphasis on improving the capability of border troops, police, intelligence service (KHAD) military groups, and local militias is unlikely to fill the gap.

A Renewed Regime Effort

The Afghan regime is trying to increase significantly the size of its Armed Forces to take over more of the fighting from the Soviets. in December Kabul decided—probably at Soviet behest—to raise the combined “operational strength” of the army, police, and KHAD to 200,000 men by the end of March. The army alone is to be increased to 140,000, almost three times its current estimated size. regime authorities are also transferring Afghan and some Soviet guard and road security duties to the police to free soldiers for offensive operations.

The government has also taken political steps to improve the reliability of the army. In November, Najibullah, former chief of KHAD, was promoted to the post of People’s Democratic (Communist) Party Central Committee Secretary—a new position that will involve overseeing KHAD, the Ministry of Interior, and the Ministry of National Defense,

according to the US Embassy in Kabul. We believe the regime’s placing its three main military arms under a single head was encouraged by the Soviets.

Senior army officers suspected of coup plotting were purged in late 1985. Generals Khalil and Khitab were taken to Moscow for interrogation by Soviet military authorities after being arrested. Shortly thereafter, former Minister of National Defense Abdul Qadir was imprisoned and questioned about his alleged role in the coup attempt.

Political and military training plays a key role in the government’s attempts to develop a competent and loyal military force. At least six Afghan division commanders were sent to a Soviet military academy in late November for refresher courses on strategy, tactics, and operations. The party Central Committee is directly involved in the administration of a new academy for the military. In October a new course was developed for KHAD and police personnel to ensure that they have the “correct” ideological framework

Pushing the Army Harder

There are growing signs that the regime is putting the army to the test.

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[redacted]

- Border troops, located in provinces bordering Pakistan and Iran, operate under the Ministry of National Defense through the Border Security Command. They are lightly armed, but they know the local terrain and people and thus have useful intelligence capabilities. [redacted]

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[redacted] two more major operations in the Central Corps area of responsibility were scheduled for the middle of January. A three-week offensive by elements of three divisions was to take place in the Bagram and Paghman areas—north and west of Kabul. These operations were later carried out. [redacted]

- The police have been transformed into the equivalent of a light infantry force that, in conjunction with the army, is responsible for urban security and suppression of the resistance in the countryside. [redacted]

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The government is also expanding the army presence in key provinces along the Pakistani border to cut off insurgent supplies, with some success. In Nangarhar, [redacted] the number of Afghan military posts and smaller firebases had more than quadrupled by late 1985, but [redacted] insurgent base camps in the province have not been penetrated and that supplies are adequate. [redacted]

- Their operational units are equipped and organized like regular infantry battalions—giving them a limited combat capability to engage small, lightly equipped insurgent groups. [redacted]

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- KHAD has also formed combat units, [redacted] Since early 1985, battalion-size KHAD units have been stationed throughout Kabul Province [redacted]

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The government is having mixed success raising new units. [redacted]

- Militias have been organized into battalions and brigades by the Ministry of Nationalities and Tribal Affairs. Originally responsible for providing security along main highways and at choke points, [redacted]

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[redacted] In the Panjsher Valley a new infantry division was raised last September, but by late October its high desertion rate prompted a KHAD investigation. [redacted]

Most militias have been formed by bribing tribal and local chiefs to sign agreements with the regime. As an indication of high-level regime concern, in early November ranking members of the party Politburo traveled to Qandahar, Helmand, Zabol, and Oruzgan

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**Developing Local Force Alternatives**

The regime is also placing increasing emphasis on improving the military capability of its local forces, which include border troops, police, KHAD groups, and local militias:

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***The Numbers Game: What Does It Mean?***

[redacted] the manning levels at the end of 1985 for most army units remained at about 50 to 55 percent of their authorized strength. [redacted]

[redacted]

- The army is filled with inexperienced, poorly trained officers and conscripts—who are usually forcibly recruited.

Nevertheless, we have not seen much evidence of mass disintegration of army units under fire—as has been the case in the past—and Kabul's recent effort will probably result in marginal improvements. [redacted]

[redacted]

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Provinces to cultivate tribal elders and encourage cooperation with the regime against the insurgents. They argued that the only way to end Afghanistan's difficulties was for the leaders to help block insurgent supply routes and withhold support from the insurgents. [redacted]

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The government is also raising youth battalions to free the army for more combat duty. Afghan youths who recently returned from military training in the USSR were formed into "party" battalions last December to guard government offices and radio stations. [redacted] Units already are in place in Qandahar and Herat. [redacted]

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**Problems Persist**

We see little likelihood that the regime's attempts to increase the Afghan military role in the war will result in significant gains:

- The military forces continue to be plagued with severe morale and manpower problems, and defections are widespread.
- Although some new units have been formed, the army continues to operate at less than half its authorized strength.

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